

- **Book of Malachi, the Final Old Testament conversation with God & His people**

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- CELEBRATE! We are finishing the Old Testament!
- I hope you've read along, but wherever you are I pray you've learned and will jump in next year with renewed excitement to understand more fully how God works in history to reveal Himself and redeem His people.
- **Good note—an overview to start the book**
- Though the exiles had been chastened and thoroughly purged of any inclination to idolatry, their leaders and they themselves came back to the homeland largely unreformed in other respects.... The burden of the book of Malachi was the glaring incongruity between the identity of the Jewish community as the people of God and the living out of all that this required of them. Theirs was not the problem of rebuilding the Temple and holy city, . . . rather, it was the issue of holy living and holy service in the aftermath of all the external accomplishments. Malachi, though dead, yet speaks to the modern world about the need to bring performance into line with profession. *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters*
- **Malachi, a final conversation between God and his people**
- This book is a conversation between God and people, but before we go into that, let's look back at the history of how God talked to his people in the past and do a fly-over review of what we've covered as we've studied the Old Testament
- At the dawn of Creation, in a perfect world we see the wonderful picture of God and Adam and Eve walking together in the cool of the day.
- How wonderful it would have been to be part of those conversations.
- But we know sin intervened.
- Adam and Eve had no idea of the consequences of their action in disobeying God. No idea that the daily conversations would cease, and they'd be cast out of the Garden.
- No idea that SIN would now be their constant companion—that an enemy would now be the constant chatter in their heads.

- **But God didn't give up on his Creation**
- Through thousands of years God continued to talk to people who sometimes listened and responded and who sometimes ignored Him.
- We know a lot about some of their stories—Noah, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, and Joseph and how God called and formed a chosen people.
- We don't know as much about the background of Job or his descendants, but his story reminds us that many other conversations have always gone on between God and people who were not of the chosen race, the Jewish race that God would work through to give his Word and eventually the Messiah.
- In the conversation we do know our Bible tells us about the Jewish people, their beginning with the call of Abraham and later—the temporary trip to Egypt that lasted 400 years, where it seemed God was silent.
- But God didn't forget about them and with God's conversation from a burning bush with Moses, God brought what had become the Hebrew nation out of Exodus
- God spoke to them all through Moses on Mt. Sinai where they were given the 10 Commandments and laws that showed them in every part of life how He wanted them to live. But God wanted a response and they promised to keep a Covenant, an agreement between God and his people. The terms were that if they would serve Him, he would bless them in the land he was giving them and if they did not, they would be punished and eventually removed from the land.
- You would think that hearing God thunder from the clouds would convince the people of His power, but they didn't trust that He would follow through on His promise to be with them when they got to the borders of the promised land.
- Once again, God didn't give up on them, and he cared for them every step of the way of their 40-year detour because of sin and finally the land was conquered as God promised and the Kingdom set up with David beginning the dynasty from which the Messiah would someday come.
- **From the time of David, Salvation history could have been glorious**
- Solomon the wisest and richest of men and admired by the world could have continued

a reign honoring God, being His witness to the world and in a one-on-one conversation with Solomon, God promised He would give him whatever he wanted. Solomon asked for wisdom and God gave him every earthly blessing.

- But like Adam so many years before, he quit listening to God and turned to other voices and the Bible tells us his wives led him astray.
- He probably had no idea of the consequences when he first thought one little sacrifice to a pagan god to please a beautiful wife was maybe a small thing, but one pagan wife led to another and another and another and eventually to horrific sins and under the rule of his son the division of the kingdom of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.
- **The rest of the Old Testament**
- Which we've covered over these many months has been the story of constantly evil kings in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and a variety of good and bad kings in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
- Through it all, God again, did not abandon his people.
- He constantly sent them prophets who reminded them of the covenant they made with God—to worship Him ONLY and to live as he called them to live.
- But many didn't listen.
- As just as God was true to his promises to bless, He was also true to his promises of judgment.
- Israel, the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria and was taken into captivity, never to return.
- **Judah the Southern Kingdom experienced extraordinary miracles, some good, some bad kings, and a long line of prophets and yet they continued to sin**
- Finally after years of warning, brief revival, but overall ignoring God Judah fell to Babylon.
- Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed and the people taken to Babylon. (forgive the great simplification of the years this unraveling took, the series
- But once again, God did not abandon his people—he kept talking to them through the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel even while in captivity.
- After 70 years in captivity a remnant returned from Babylon to Israel and after a

- struggling start and a 16-year pause, they finally completed a modest Temple
- Though they needed God's rousing calls to get to work from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah
- **Meanwhile back in Babylon**
- Many Jews were settled and comfortable, Esther, an orphan of captive Jews becomes queen of the Medes and the Persians— in the book named after her we have the threatened slaughter of the Jews, but their eventual salvation
- A little while after this God calls Ezra to take another group back to Israel.
- They go, he preaches, but problems remain in Jerusalem with people not wholeheartedly listening to God. The temple had been built, but one again, they quit and the walls of Jerusalem were a pile of rubble.
- Meanwhile back at the court.....
- A high official, the cup-bearer to the king, a man named Nehemiah asks one of the people who came back from Jerusalem, how it was going and when he heard the people were not doing well because the city had no wall, no protection, basically wasn't really a city in what defined a city in the ancient world, God touched his heart to do something about it.
- God also touched the heart of the king Nehemiah served and he not only gave Nehemiah permission to go and rebuild the wall, but he completely funded it.
- Nehemiah gets to Jerusalem and not only does he rebuild the wall, but he helps to rebuild the people spiritually as well.
- Ezra is preaching while Nehemiah is building, and they institute a number of reforms in two major areas:
- Intermarriage with pagan women—it must cease—that is what caused the fall of Solomon and their nation
- Proper temple services and caring for the priesthood not maintained—these must be cleaned up and done properly
- **Things appear to get somewhat better**
- Nehemiah returns back to the palace, but then comes back to Jerusalem and finds once again the Temple and priesthood not what they should be....
- We see his response in the last chapter of Nehemiah when he comes back and is furious with what he finds:
- The Levites were not receiving the tithes they needed to live on, so they went back

to their farms and a pagan named Tobiah had literally moved into the Temple.

- They were not observing the Sabbath, were buying and selling
- Worst of all, they were again marrying pagan women
- **His response was rather dramatic**
- *Neh. 13: 25: I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. <sup>26</sup> Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. <sup>31</sup> I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the first fruits.*
- *Ends the book with this prayer... "Remember me with favor, my God."*
- Somewhere during this time Malachi starts to preach
- **This is the context of the preaching of Malachi and God's final conversations with his people for 400 years—we'll now go through the book with applications**
- The Prophet Malachi begins the book by confronting the priests who are bringing blemished sacrifices
- **Chapter 1: 6** *"A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty.*
- *"It is you priests who show contempt for my name.*
- *"But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' . . .*
- *"By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. <sup>8</sup> When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the Lord Almighty. . . . .*
- **13** *And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says*

*the Lord Almighty.*

- *"When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the Lord. <sup>14</sup> "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord.*
- **What the priests should have done:**
- *And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue," says the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup> "My covenant was with him (the tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe in charge of worship and teaching), a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. <sup>6</sup> True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.*
- **7** *"For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth. <sup>8</sup> But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the Lord Almighty. <sup>9</sup> "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law."*
- **Applications not profound here**
- God is not pleased with faulty worship
- We should bring him our best—and that includes I think our best attitudes when we come to worship
- Spiritual leaders should be ones of "righteousness and peace"—those who turn people from sin
- And they should teach—not just make people feel good—but "true instruction"
- Keep the integrity of the Gospel message—don't water it down to make people feel good
- If we aren't challenged from our spiritual leaders, who will?
- The book of Malachi then goes into the passage in 2:1-16 on how God hates divorce\*\*\*\*specifically talking about in this context divorcing first Jewish wives to marry younger pagan women and children were suffering spiritually because of it. Divorce is not God's plan—and most who

have gone through it hate it also—but it is not the unforgiveable sin.

- **Book goes on...God is tired of them.... And judgement is coming**
- *Malachi 2:17 You have wearied the Lord with your words. (can you imagine God being tired of listening to you—how horribly sad and tragic)*
- *“How have we wearied him?” you ask.*
- *By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?”*
- **It isn’t pleasing to God to say evil is good.** As always—you must know the Word to know what is truly evil and what is truly good...as God goes on to remind them of what is truly evil:
- *Mal. 3:5 “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty.”*
- So similar to previous warnings given again and again in the covenant and by previous prophets—
- Personal holiness and truth is imperative, but also God constantly expresses his concern for those less fortunate and He expects his people to do the same
- You can so often truly tell what someone is like with how they treat people they consider less important than they are—waiters, store clerks
- **Remember the situation Nehemiah faced with Levites returning to their fields? This is how Malachi directly addresses this**
- The Levites returning to their fields because they were not supported is the context of this message:
- **8 “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.**
- *“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’*
- *“In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. <sup>11</sup> I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines*

*in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty.*

- <sup>12</sup> “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty.*
- **Context and application**
- **Context again was the support of the Levitical priesthood and the PROMISES are specifically to them—the nation was to support them with the tithes so they could serve—it is not an unconditional promise that if you tithe today God will bless you.**
- So what about giving today?
- We are told to be generous, the NT constantly encourages generosity, most often in relationship to those who serve God, Paul often talked about giving to needy Christians. We are encouraged to manage our resources well, not be in debt, and to care for those less fortunate.
- But we also know from the lives of NT saints that we are not guaranteed physical and financial prosperity IN THIS LIFE. Not a one of them was well off and Jesus himself was homeless
- **Some more thoughts....**
- Recognize all we have and are belongs to God—bottom line no matter what
- But to be honest, **Tithing is not a New Testament Command.**
- **“The Storehouse” is NOT the local church—** In that day it was the place responsible in that day for all teaching, worship, sacrifices AND much social welfare— Unless local churches want to do that for their communities they cannot claim to be “the Storehouse”
- **Tithes— beyond that, what were the people supposed to do with the Tithe?**
- *Deut. 14: 22 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. <sup>23</sup> Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always. <sup>24</sup> But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the Lord your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the Lord will choose to put his Name is so far away), <sup>25</sup> then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place*

*the Lord your God will choose. <sup>26</sup> Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice.*

- *<sup>27</sup> And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own.*
- *<sup>28</sup> At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, <sup>29</sup> so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*
- **3 Things to be done with the Tithe:**
- #1 Celebrate!—the whole first part of this passage
- #2 Support those in Ministry—do not neglect the Levites
- #3 Support foreigners, the fatherless, and widows
- **WE MUST** always look at **CONTEXT** in passages on the Bible about giving—much of what we do is simply based on contemporary culture, not Biblical commands, not saying that is sin, but let's be honest about it
- Not just in the Old Testament -in 2 Cor. 8 and 9, many verses from these chapters used when it is fund-raising time in at church, (sow sparingly, reap sparingly, God loves a cheerful giver, etc.) but that isn't what they are about at all—**NOT** about giving to a local church.
- They are about a special offering Paul was taking up for the poor Christians in Jerusalem and he nowhere mentions tithing as part of it.
- And here is an important guideline when we talk about giving:
- *<sup>2</sup> Cor 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.*
- *<sup>13</sup> Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.*
- \*\*\*Paul very clear giving isn't the same for everyone—Though even those with little, were able to give 2 Cor 8:2 *In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy*

*and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.—but people shouldn't feel guilt over a specific amount*

- Realistically for some who are very well off, tithing doesn't make a dent in anything—for those who can barely pay their bills, generosity, tithe or not might be a HUGE sacrifice
- **Are blessings for all when giving**
- 2 Cor 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup> Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, **you will abound in every good work.**
- **NOTE: blessed in able to do good works—not just having lots of material stuff**
- <sup>12</sup> This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. <sup>13</sup> **Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.** <sup>14</sup> And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. <sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!
- Conclusion: spiritual blessings will always come to the giver and to others who see it—it is a witness when you give, especially in our selfish world
- **The most important thing to give and two final thought on giving**
- Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies (every part of you) as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1, NIV)....how goes on....don't be conformed to the world, but be transformed—what it takes to be transformed, time, focus, effort—giving all of yourself is much more important than just giving money and then doing whatever you want to do to make yourself happy
- Good advice.....
- *"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe*

rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure (and I would add TIME) on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure (and I would say work for the Kingdom) excludes them.”  
 – C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

- Have a conversation with God about your giving, to who, when, how much—and remember many ways to give more than money—give of yourself first in life and love, in time and passion, in hobbies and health, in spare time and service—have a conversation with the Lord on what it would mean for you to be a living sacrifice.
- **Book ends with reminders that this isn't all there is—we ought not to focus primarily on it**
- Judgment is coming
- *Mal. 4:1 Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.*
- **If you want it all now—now all is what you will get**
- **When Bill H. became a believer, Dr. B had him put notes on all his stuff “soon to be burned” a good reminder if we are too attached to anything of this world**
- Some day—ALL wrongs will be righted and justice will be done
- **God goes on: 2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.**
- **Some day for those who love God—You WILL be healed, you WILL be joyful!**
- And also this wonderful passage:
- **A great way to end this book and study of the Old Testament**
- *Mal. 3:16 Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.*
- **17 “On the day when I act,” says the Lord Almighty, “they will be my treasured**

possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.<sup>18</sup> And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

- You who have listened and learned, discussed and prayed.
- Not only are our conversations with God important, but when we discuss Him with others are incredibly important because ....
- ***The Lord Almighty is listening. And it has been recorded.***
- ***Your sins are forgiven and forgotten, but what we've talked about what you talk about when you talk about the things of the Lord are remembered.***
- And one day when all that is evil and sad is melting away in judgment, we will be spared—his treasured possession to once again walk with our God in loving conversation, forever.